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SUBJECT: Senegal: Are the Electoral Rolls Corrupt?

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 24, Embassy Pol staff debriefed two computer experts who audited the national electoral database on February 10-11, 2009. The audit was requested by the coalition of opposition parties and was conducted with the concurrence and support of the Ministry of Interior that runs the database and organizes all elections in Senegal. The experts concluded that the database is irredeemably flawed. For the first time, it seems as if the opposition has concrete evidence of at least incompetence or, at worst, fraud that may cast a shadow over the reliability of the elections results. End Summary.

What's in a name?

¶2. (SBU) Prior to the 2007 presidential elections, the opposition had conducted an audit of the electoral database containing all registered voters and did not find anything amiss. Two weeks ago, they repeated the same process audit but this time they seemed to have been less fortunate. The leading expert on the team, Iba Gueye, told Embassy, "I don't know what led me to ask to see a breakdown of the list by family names." Upon closer inspection, Gueye discovered 17,825 family names, this in a country where the number of family names is very limited (many Senegalese are named Ndiaye "njaay" or Diop, "joop"). Gueye continued, "By the looks of it, real Senegalese names were taken and then new ones were created by adding and removing letters. Take for example the name Balde (of which there were 49,824 entries in the database); in the list Balde is preceded or followed by variants such as BALD, BALDECK, BALDEF BALDA or BAL DEE. What worries me the most is that all these names represent legally registered voters, who have been assigned to polling stations and who have legitimate national identity and voter cards. But, clearly these names are not Senegalese. What's worse is that the list is full of such variants that cannot realistically be accounted for by claiming that they are there because of a clerical or data entry error." Gueye added that when they asked for the addresses of the aforementioned voters the system failed to respond.

Inconsistencies

¶3. (SBU) The auditors noted that on February 2, 2009 there were 4,818,913 registered voters; an increase of 62,571 from the January 31, 2007 audit when the figure was 4,756,342, "logically, these all should be newly registered voters." But when they conducted a search of new voters, the computer tech at the Ministry found only 6,715 new voters in the database; a discrepancy of 55,856 voters "who may or may not be real." Furthermore, the recent creation of three new regions meant that a total of 872,407 voters have to have their cards reprinted to reflect the new administrative entities in which they live. If this figure is added to the 6,715 newly registered voters it should lead to the conclusion that only 934,311 new voters cards need to be printed. When auditors questioned the Ministry's card production unit they were told that 1,416,716 cards have been printed since January 31, 2007.

Cosmetic biometry

¶4. (SBU) President Abdoulaye Wade recently lauded the digitization of the electoral process with the introduction of digital fingerprinting for voter cards. However, the auditors observed that neither the card printing unit nor the voter registration unit was linked to any sort of biometric database. Thus, with only text files that are not backed up by any biometric security features these two units could, conceivably, create and modify entries at will. Meanwhile, even though the voter card is bar-coded, it is very unlikely that any polling station will be equipped with barcode readers or computers. In fact, during the last Presidential election Poloff witnessed votes being counted by candle light because the school at which the voting station was located had no electricity.

Rejection and Manipulation

¶5. (SBU) The Ministry of Interior has already said that it will ignore the findings of the auditors because the latter did not present a report to the GOS at the conclusion of their mission. Furthermore, the Minister of Interior, Cheikh Tidiane Sy, has rejected the opposition's demand that an ultraviolet spray be used instead of indelible ink to prevent multiple voting. The auditors insist on using the spray, which was used in Bosnia, because it is more reliable than indelible ink which can be rendered ineffective by rubbing grease on one's finger prior to dipping it into the ink. It is also interesting that Minister Sy's son, Mame Ousmane Sy, is President Wade's IT advisor and is allegedly the guru who tinkers with the electoral data base; a fact confirmed by an Embassy contact who was an advisor to the President.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Leading members of the opposition have told Poloff that they are putting in place "brigades" that will physically prevent registered foreigners (Guineans from Conakry or Bissau) from voting. Each candidate has been instructed to remain at his polling station and an "informal identification process" will be in place to limit fraud. As the elections approach the rhetoric is getting more and more inflammatory and this might pave the way to election day violence, especially if the opposition can use the results of the audit to somehow persuade the public that the ruling party is using fraud to assure itself of victory.

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